Thomas McCulloch
His Life and Times

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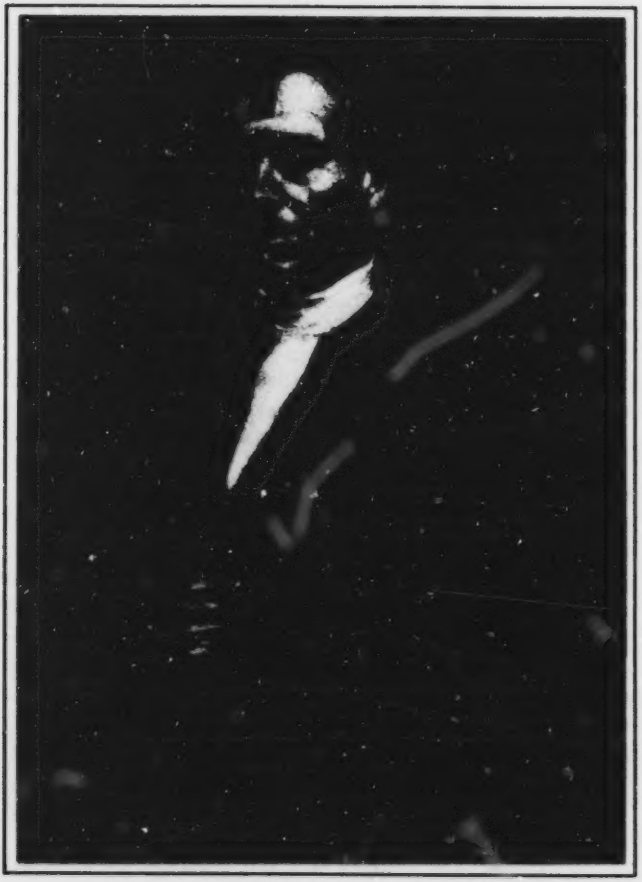


Portrait of Rev. Dr. Thomas McCulloch by Sir Daniel Macnee, 1845 (Atlantic School of Theology Collection).

Our knowledge of Thomas McCulloch's ideas and attitudes comes mainly from two sources: a very dull biography written by his son William, and McCulloch's own letters to his friend the Reverend John Mitchell in Glasgow. These letters are full of interest—lively, pawky in their wit, and explain much that we would perhaps not know otherwise about the intricate affairs and controversial affairs of the Academy at Pictou which he founded. They were returned to the McCulloch family by the Mitchells after McCulloch's death, and are now in the McCulloch papers in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. Unfortunately, they do not begin until 1815.

Thomas McCulloch, Scots Presbyterian minister, educator and political reformer, is among the least known of the great nineteenth century Canadians. Yet for a few years in the early 1800s in the little town of Pictou in Nova Scotia his teaching created a kind of intellectual ferment that had not occurred anywhere else in the country. Had he remained in Scotland he might never have been more than a mildly dissenting minister in some small town near Glasgow. He was fortunate in coming to Pictou when he did. The colony was growing, education would become a necessity, and he was the bearer of a fine, yeasty ferment of dissent. The time, the place and the man were all right for each other, and McCulloch in consequence had a lasting impact on Nova Scotia, and eventually on all of Canada. He was like a pebble thrown into a pond that was Nova Scotia then, and the ripples are touching us still.

On the surface, his life sounds modestly orthodox. He arrived in Pictou from Scotland in 1803, aged twenty-seven; most of his years thereafter were spent in that little pioneer community, as missionary-minister of the First Presbyterian Church and as founder-principal of Pictou Academy. He had been ordained in the Secessionist Church, a body which earlier had broken away from the Established Church of Scotland. In 1838 he left Pictou to become the first principal of Dalhousie College in Halifax. It reads like a model life, quiet and worthy. Yet buried in those few lines is the story of the man who in his time became the very symbol of controversy in Nova Scotia, the essence of opposition to the Establishment.

In McCulloch's own view his greatest work was undoubtedly the Academy at Pictou; it was his creation, the manifestation of his profound belief that education should be liberal, non-sectarian and available to all. He put official Halifax into a state of cold antagonism over the Academy; on the subject of the Academy he was passionate, sometimes unreasonable, perhaps

obsessional. But he was fighting for something much greater than his Academy To quote Professor John Irving, editor of McCulloch's *The Stepsure Letters*,[1] "Long before Joseph Howe began his work (for responsible government), McCulloch was teaching the people of Nova Scotia the new ideas which were ultimately to change their whole system of government."

His portrait shows a very Scottish face—a large nose, long upper lip, determined mouth, a steadfast gaze. The expression is open, with nothing closed-in or parsimonious. The mouth quivers on the edge of laughter. Underneath the portrait is his name, and the words "Child of the Scottish Heart and Mind." When I first looked at the face and read that brief and perhaps romantic phrase, I had a sudden impression of a powerfully attractive and interesting character. That early impression has not altered, in spite of the fact that it is difficult to understand some of McCulloch's Presbyterian theology today, and even more difficult to accept it. He continues to project the essence of the Scots intellectual of his time, in whom the heart was indeed partner to the mind.

Few facts are available about McCulloch's life in Scotland and the family which produced him. Something, however, can be deduced. He was born in 1776, the year the American Declaration of Independence was signed. The McCulloch family lived in the village of Fereneze, in the parish of Neilston in Renfrewshire, near the growing industrial centre of Paisley just west of Glasgow. Many Glasgow fortunes had been built on the tobacco trade, and much Glasgow money had been lost with the collapse of that trade after the American Revolution; but Paisley was prospering on its own with the developing cotton and linen industry and the manufacture of printed fabrics. In Thomas' youth Paisley was famous throughout Europe for the quality of its fine silks, gauzes, linens and cottons. The textile trade had become the most important industry in Scotland, and even Fereneze, once entirely agricultural, had become a part of the industrial revolution.

Thomas's father, Michael McCulloch, was a master block printer in the textile trade, which in itself tells us something about the probable conditions of family life. Textile workers such as Michael McCulloch were highly skilled and well paid, and he would have been able to see that his sons had a good education.

Thomas was the second son in a family of five sons and one daughter. Andrew, the eldest son, went into business, first in Britain and later in Lyons, a centre of the French textile industry. Another brother, William, was a surgeon and practiced in Nova Scotia until his early death at thirty-seven. George, the youngest, was a cabinetmaker and ultimately joined Thomas in Pictou.

The fact that Thomas came from the Paisley district tells us a good deal about his background. By the early years of the nineteenth century the town was supporting three subscription libraries, a philosophical institution, numerous reading clubs and several literary, debating and political societies. It was noted for a tendency to radicalism in politics, and for producing poets[2] and Secessionist preachers. The handloom weavers in particular tended to be well-read, for they worked in their cottages, where they could prop books up on their looms. And they read avidly, everything from the classics to Tom Paine and the contemporary Scottish writers. The works of Voltaire and Rousseau and other French savants were widely read in Scotland, and the French Revolution had a considerable influence on political opinion during the years when Thomas was a student.

It was that intellectually stirring period known as the Scottish Enlightenment, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when Scotland was producing some of the most brilliant and creative minds in Europe. The great names are still great: David Hume the philosopher, who turned European minds in a new direction, with reverberations that shook the continent; Francis Hutcheson, also a philosopher, a liberal in both religion and politics; Adam Smith, who developed the new science of political economy; Adam Ferguson, one of the fathers of sociology; Robert Adam, the architectural genius; Joseph Black, who discovered carbon dioxide and latent heat. Black was one of the great scholars of Europe, an experimenter in chemistry as well as in physics; his work opened doors for the later discoveries of Priestley, Cavendish and Lavoisier. It was Black who gave James Watt, the young inventor, laboratory space at Glasgow University for his experiments with heat and energy.

The Scottish universities were pre-Reformation and ecclesiastical foundations: St. Andrews in 1414, Glasgow in 1451, King's

College Aberdeen in 1496. Edinburgh University, a relative latecomer, had received its charter from the city in 1582. And in Aberdeen a second and secular university, Mareschal College, was founded in 1593, an outcome of the Reformation. All five universities managed to survive the tremendous storms and changes of the Reformation, followed by the turbulence of the religious wars, the Restoration and the accession of William of Orange in 1690.

In the mid-eighteenth century there arose a new vitality in the country, a kind of flowering of the Scottish spirit. These were the years of reform and development within the universities, the period when Scottish philosophy came to be clearly slanted towards moral problems and the state of man in his present life rather than in the world to come. By the time of the French Revolution professors in Scotland had an almost obsessive interest in world problems and progress.

Edinburgh University was to some extent focused on philosophy, the professions (particularly medicine) and the new social sciences. Glasgow, on the other hand, was more conscious of the adventures involved in the development of science and technology. Industry was expanding rapidly, and in spite of periodic reverses Scotland was generally prosperous until the end of the Napoleonic wars.

Emigration to the New World was in part responsible for this prosperity. There had been an increasing procession of Scots to the American colonies and the West Indies for more than a hundred years, and many Glasgow fortunes were made in Virginia tobacco and, later, in West Indies sugar. By the 1770s Glasgow was among the three or four top seaports in Britain. Architecture became the visible expression of this prosperity; the merchant princes of Glasgow built themselves fine Georgian houses, sumptuously adorned with decorative plaster work that could rival many a London terrace. All over Europe people talked admiringly about the classical harmony of Edinburgh's New Town and the squares and crescents that were making it one of the loveliest of European cities. This was the background of the vigorous and exacting tradition that Thomas McCulloch brought from Scotland to Pictou.

McCulloch was a minister of what was called the Secession Church; though still considering themselves Presbyterians, its members had many years earlier broken away from the Church of Scotland. The story of the Secession is a complicated one, with many issues involved. One of the main reasons for the split had been the system of patronage then followed by the Established (i.e., the State) Church of Scotland, which permitted landowners and lairds to appoint the ministers in their parishes without consulting the congregation. The Secessionists saw this as totally contrary to the principles of Presbyterianism; it should be the congregation that chose the minister, even if the members of the congregation were tenants of the laird.

The dispute over patronage demonstrated that the gulf separating the two churches was largely one of political philosophy. The Church of Scotland, as the State Church, was inherently conservative in politics as well as theology. The evangelical Secession Church was sympathetic to the movements of political reform stirring in Europe, and its ministers were in the vanguard of the anti-slavery movement. Indeed, when James MacGregor, the first Secession minister, arrived in Pictou in 1786, one of his first acts in Nova Scotia was to produce a pamphlet against an act of slavery which he believed to have been committed by a Truro minister, the Reverend Daniel Cock.

McCulloch attended the University of Glasgow, where he studied some medicine as well as subjects more closely related to life as a minister. He then went on to study with the professor of Divinity of the Secession Church, who happened to be the minister at Whitburn (between Edinburgh and Glasgow). When he received his licence as a minister he was called to the little church at Stewarton, near Glasgow. Here he continued to study literature, Oriental languages and British constitutional law, all to the subsequent benefit of Nova Scotia.

The Stewarton congregation was small and far from wealthy; after four years McCulloch found his stipend of £80 a year painfully inadequate, and he decided to emigrate. In the end he was "missioned", as the phrase went, to a church on Prince Edward Island. The voyage was normal for the time; Thomas McCulloch, his wife and three children were at sea for many weeks on a lumber vessel ill-equipped for passengers. They

caught all the autumn storms, and it was early November before they reached Pictou. The year was 1803.

While the McCullochs were still on board their vessel in Pictou Harbour they were visited by two Pictou men, Messrs. Pagan and Dawson,[3] who told them that the Northumberland Strait was already filled with ice, and that the passage across to Prince Edward Island would be in an open boat and very dangerous. They were thus persuaded to delay crossing to the Island until spring. The Pictou legend has it that during this conversation the two Pictonians realized the quality of McCulloch's intellect and the extent of his study at Glasgow. The final magical note was sounded when they discovered him to be the owner of a "pair of globes", terrestrial and celestial—the whole known universe. How could they let such a treasure slip out of their hands and over to the Island? The McCullochs remained in Pictou not for the winter but for almost thirty-five years.

By the time they arrived in 1803, Pictou already had its own particular flavour, largely Scots Presbyterian. It had first been settled nearly forty years earlier by a land company called the Philadelphia Company. The Crown granted huge tracts of land to such companies on certain conditions, one being that a proportion of land be settled within an agreed number of years. The remaining land could later be sold, with the hope of profit to the company.

Some of the land companies were of dubious merit, but the Philadelphia Company seems to have been respectable, for it had attracted Dr. John Witherspoon, an eminent Presbyterian minister, a graduate of Edinburgh University and, since 1768, principal of Princeton College in New Jersey.

In 1765 the Philadelphia Company had obtained 200,000 acres along the north shore of Nova Scotia, mostly in what is now Pictou County. Their first settlers were six families (some of Scottish origin) who had been living in some comfort in Philadelphia and Maryland but were induced in 1767 to venture to the uncleared, uninhabited forest that was to become Pictou. A few more settlers trickled in, and by 1770 there were eighteen families in the district. By 1772 the time limit on the Company's grant had nearly expired.

Faced with the urgent necessity of getting settlers on to their land in Pictou, two members of the Philadelphia Company took action. Together, Dr. Witherspoon and John Pagan initiated a plan to attract emigrants from Scotland to Pictou. Pagan was a Glasgow merchant with wide experience in North America; in September of 1772 he placed a series of advertisements in Scottish newspapers over Witherspoon's name, describing Pictou as a sort of immigrants' dream, and offering to settlers not only liberal terms for transportation and for provisions for the first year, but also the opportunity—irresistible to a Highlander—of acquiring his own land.

For one hundred years and more, emigrants had been leaving Scotland for the West Indies, the Carolinas, Virginia and New England. Few Scots had yet ventured to Nova Scotia, although English, German, Acadian and New England settlers were already living in the province. But in the years following the tragic and doomed Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, led by Prince Charles Stuart, the collapse of the traditional clan system had been accelerating. Under George III, the close bonds between chief and clansmen were loosening, and the old, almost feudal relationship between Highland chieftains and their clans was

Pictou from the S.S.W. by J. E. Woolford, 1817 (Nova Scotia Museum Collection).

being forced by economic pressure into change; the chiefs had become landlords and their clansmen mere tenants. By 1772 there were many reasons for emigrating, but one of the most important was the possibility of owning land in North America. Hard pressed for money, many of the landlord-chiefs had raised the rents of their farms beyond endurance. A generation after 1745, many Highlanders had begun to feel that their only choice was to leave Scotland or stay there and starve.

In the late 1760s and early 1770s, the trickle of emigrants leaving Scotland for the New World had been increasing to a steady stream. By 1773, people were leaving the Highlands in great numbers. James Boswell, touring Scotland that summer with Dr. Samuel Johnson, reported a rage for emigration.[4] At least a dozen emigrant vessels must have sailed that season, perhaps even more. Two hundred and fifty people left from Fort George, more than three hundred from Glengarry, eight hundred and forty from the Island of Lewis.[5] From Maryburgh four hundred and twenty-five emigrants sailed in September, and from Dornoch two hundred and fifty.[6] Three vessels sailed that season from Stromness in Orkney, with seven hundred and seventy-five emigrants on board, bound for New York and other American cities.[7]

John Pagan owned a battered little vessel, the *Hector*. In the early summer of that year when there was such a rage for emigration, the *Hector* arrived in the port of Glasgow to recruit emigrants. For whatever reason they found only three families and five young men willing to emigrate to Nova Scotia from there. So the *Hector* sailed north to remote Loch Broom in Wester Ross, where she lay for some weeks while the news of sailing for Nova Scotia travelled around the Highlands. But it was not until the 1st of July, 1773, that the *Hector* sailed for Pictou with some two hundred passengers, most of them Gaelic speakers from Wester Ross, Cromarty and Sutherland. Eleven weeks later she dropped anchor in Pictou Harbour. She was the first emigrant ship from Scotland to Nova Scotia, and thus the *Hector* later came to be known as a kind of Canadian *Mayflower*.

The Philadelphia Company was not able to fulfill its promises to the immigrants; perhaps the circumstances of the time defeated them. The provisions promised for the first winter

and spring failed to arrive when expected. The settlers had to face winter without adequate food supplies. Then they had naively supposed that they would be given land ready for farming. What they received was virgin forest. Many of the *Hector* people left Pictou soon after landing, to spend the winter in Truro or Halifax, where they hoped to find work to feed their families.

For those who stayed it was a period of desperately hard work, but somehow they managed to clear land, plant crops and cut timber for shipment to the Navy dockyard in Halifax and they survived. By 1786 they were able to send to Scotland for a minister, and soon there arrived in Pictou the Gaelic-speaking James MacGregor of the Secession Church, twenty-six years old, and the only minister for many, many miles up and down the thinly settled north shore of Nova Scotia.

Although he was a graduate of Edinburgh University and in that sense a man of the Enlightenment, MacGregor came from a background that culturally and economically was very different from McCulloch's. He grew up in the parish of Comrie in Perthshire. It was still largely a Gaelic-speaking area, but there were a number of schools and some fairly modern farms. MacGregor's father was a small tenant farmer; as well as the farm, he had a small whisky still (which farmers were permitted at the time), and it was the proceeds from the still which helped to pay for James' expenses at the university. He was the only member of his family to receive such an education.

The progress and prosperity of the Lowlands had not touched the more remote Highlands and Islands, where the traditional style of living for ordinary people was still so primitive as to shock the few brave English travellers of the 1770s who ventured into such wild places. Comrie, however, would have represented a half-way stage between traditional clan life in the north and the growing industrial development in the Lowlands. And in Pictou MacGregor would have been a link between Highland and Lowland settlers, for he not only knew the Lowlands but was also a Gaelic scholar and fine poet, part of that continuing Highland life of strong clan ties, of work done communally, of music and poetry and the ancient tales of bravery and valour told around the fire in the evening. Between

them, MacGregor and McCulloch represented the duality of the Scottish character.

Pictou County was one of the last areas of the Nova Scotia mainland to be settled; other parts of the province had been more easily reached. When James MacGregor arrived there were still no roads. To get to Pictou he had to ride on horseback over a rough track from Halifax to Truro, then follow a blazed trail through the forest. He had expected at least a village, but even as a village, Pictou did not yet exist; people lived on farms scattered widely throughout the district.

By 1791, however, there were 1,300 people living in the area; by the time McCulloch arrived in 1803 it had grown to about 5,000. Although a large group of settlers had arrived from Dumfriesshire about 1790, the majority of the settlers were still Highlanders and still living on farms widely scattered through the countryside. But there was now a centre, a real village. In 1803 it consisted of about eighteen buildings, including taverns, one or two stores, a shipyard and a smithy, along with a number of private wharves. There was a jail, but not yet a church; in the summer services were held out of doors, and in winter in the big room in the tavern.

The green hills of Pictou County were covered with stands of virgin white pine, and Pictou's mainstay had become the timber trade. Ship-building was already important. In 1798, William Lowden the shipbuilder launched at Pictou his famous *Harriet*, which at 422 tons was the largest ship yet to be built in a Nova Scotia shipyard. In 1803 some 50 vessels were loaded at Pictou. As in other parts of the Maritime provinces, ships were built locally and loaded with local timber before sailing to Britain, where both ship and cargo were often sold. Coal production was beginning as well. Mr. MacGregor had been the one to find it, on the edge of his own property, and he used it to heat his house.

That was Pictou as the McCullochs found it in the late autumn of 1803. Mrs. McCulloch was the daughter of another Secessionist minister. She had left a comfortable, settled life in Scotland for the privations of the New World. What must she have thought of tiny, pioneer Pictou? The physical strength as well as the spiritual fortitude that was required of those early ministers, and their wives, is almost

beyond our comprehension today. In Scotland a minister such as McCulloch was something of a gentleman; in Pictou he and his family had to contend with real hardship and to learn many pioneering skills. For a number of years he spent two or three afternoons a week cutting his own firewood. The youthful James MacGregor had achieved great local fame by travelling over his huge parish, which extended from Merigomish to the New Brunswick border and beyond. In summer he went on foot and by canoe, and on snowshoes in winter. McCulloch never learned to use snowshoes well enough to find them useful, and in his first years in Pictou he went everywhere on foot, winter and summer, looking after his own parish, teaching school, and often (because of his uncompleted medical studies in Glasgow) acting as unpaid country doctor.

It was many years before he could afford a horse, and he never did manage to find the money for a carriage. He could never count on getting his small salary of £150 a year regularly. He wrote later to a friend: "Dr. MacGregor and Mr. Ross passed through many a stipendless day, and I have borrowed the loaf which was to feed my little family on the Sabbath." Ministers in Nova Scotia had to discipline themselves to life on credit and the hope that some day the arrears of pay would be settled.

McCulloch was unexpectedly enabled to build a pleasant and modestly comfortable house in Pictou, although even this had its sting. A Pictou merchant had imported some bricks on speculation and found himself unable to sell them so he offered them to the minister as a gift. When completed the house had charm, but perhaps the merchant felt that charm was worth money, for he then sent McCulloch a demand for payment for the bricks.

The McCullochs found life in colonial Pictou extremely expensive. To earn some much-needed extra money, McCulloch decided some time after his arrival to open a school. There were good reasons. Outside Halifax, schools were as yet few and inadequate; the teaching was poor, the teachers often itinerant and always miserably paid. Pictou was no different from the rest. McCulloch, graduate of Glasgow University, knew that he was competent to give the Pictou children a really good education. He had also to provide for the proper education of his own family.

McCulloch House, photographed in the late 1800s, before the roof was altered (Nova Scotia Museum Collection).

At first his school was in his own house. It was not long, however, before he had to expand, and he put up a schoolhouse on his own property. It was made of logs, in proper pioneer style, with the chinks filled in with moss. Blackboards had not reached Pictou yet, and wide pine boards were used instead. But makeshift equipment was unimportant. What mattered was the teaching, and so quickly did the word spread about the excellence of McCulloch's teaching that pupils came from all over Nova Scotia, and even from the West Indies—this last a reflection of the healthy trade growing between Nova Scotia and the Caribbean.

McCulloch seems to have been a man of natural, unstudied charm, gentlemanly in manner. But he was also outspoken, formidable in argument, his wit sarcastic. In his earlier years in Pictou the community was still very rough, a sometimes boisterous mixture of disbanded soldiers, Lowland settlers from Dumfries, Highlanders still speaking Gaelic, and more immigrants arriving all the time, along with merchants and traders, some from the south of Scotland, some from England. It could not have been very easy to minister to such a mixture of people, or to teach their sons either, and when things were not going well there is often in his letters a note of self-pity which seems at odds with the rest of his character.

McCulloch House as it appears today (Nova Scotia Museum Photo).

Certainly McCulloch managed to antagonize a good number of people, some on questions of religion, others by his high expectations for the Academy. In any case, someone in Pictou felt so strongly about McCulloch that one Saturday night he set fire to the schoolhouse, and it burned to the ground. But as a case of arson it was futile; the fire caused the community to rise to his support, and a substantial frame building soon replaced the modest log schoolhouse. There was nowhere in Pictou for boys to board, so McCulloch built a wing on to his own house, with a dining room/classroom downstairs, and upstairs a dormitory for sixteen boys. The dauntless Mrs. McCulloch provided meals for them and sometimes clothing as well.

McCulloch's hope of earning extra money was not very well realized; somehow, many parents forgot to pay their school bills. But in 1811 the government passed the Grammar School Act, providing for grammar schools in seven counties and three districts of the province, one of these last being Pictou. Since McCulloch's school was already flourishing, it became the Grammar School for the Pictou district, with McCulloch as head teacher. It was supported by a grant of £150 a year, and this somewhat eased his situation.

The Grammar School, however, was not McCulloch's ultimate objective. There was still a desperate shortage of ministers in Eastern Nova Scotia. Young men in Scotland, comfortable in their parishes, were understandably unwilling to come to a hard, uncomfortable life as pioneering missionaries in such a remote, damp and chilly place as Nova Scotia was thought to be, and when they did come they were often not at all suited to the life. James MacGregor had waited nine long and lonely years before he was joined by an assistant from Scotland in 1795, and a mere handful of ministers had arrived since then.

To the immigrant settlers, however, Nova Scotia represented a hope of something better than they had known in Scotland, yet there were not enough ministers to marry them or to bury them either, let alone give them the spiritual guidance that they so clearly seemed to need in this rough new land. With his years of experience, Mr. MacGregor felt that the best solution would be to train native-born ministers in Nova Scotia but he did not see this as even a distant possibility. The Secession Church certainly had no money for a training college. It was McCulloch, so new to the country, so young and confident, who immediately provided MacGregor with a solution. It would be Pictou that would raise the money for a college of course.

With some skeptical support from Mr. MacGregor, McCulloch began to lay plans. As early as 1805 a society was organized to work for the establishment of "a college of learning" in Pictou. Over the next three years Pictonians subscribed about £1,000, a sum rather more than they would find it easy to pay. MacGregor headed the list with a subscription of £20, "provided", he wrote, "the Harbour Congregation pay me the £16 they owe me."

McCulloch was looking to the future. From the beginning his college was intended not only to train Secession ministers but also to provide a liberal education for students desiring to enter the professions. A college already existed in the province. King's College at Windsor, ambitiously founded in 1788 with a large three-storey building, was intended to become the centre of education for all British North America. By the early 1800s, however, the building was becoming shabby and the teaching was of uncertain quality. Further, this colonial institution was inflexible on a question of religious principle. Modelling itself

on Oxford University, King's would accept only those students who subscribed to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. This single fact was responsible for the direction that McCulloch's life took in Nova Scotia.

While the Anglican Church numbered the important official class of Halifax among its members, it amounted to only one-fifth of the population of the province. Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Catholics and other groups of Dissenters made up the four-fifths majority. Yet unless they could afford to study abroad, they were denied the education that would give them entry to the professions. To the Scots in particular this was a shameful heresy, for in Scotland the universities had by tradition accepted students of all faiths.

King's had been the project of the first Bishop of Nova Scotia, Dr. Charles Inglis, whose task it was to make the infant church a dominant force in colonial life. He had come from Ireland to America as a young man; he had been a teacher in a church school in Pennsylvania, a missionary to the Mohawks and, finally, rector of the wealthy Trinity Church in New York. During the American Revolution, while Dr. Witherspoon at Princeton was safely preaching the ideals of Republicanism and signing the Declaration of Independence, Dr. Inglis was risking his life each time he preached loyalty to the King. Finally, angry Republicans burned Trinity Church to the ground, and Dr. Inglis lost not only church but home and possessions. In 1787, after the peace, he was appointed to Nova Scotia as Bishop. Almost immediately he began working to re-establish at Windsor the King's College that he had supported in New York. His first objective was identical to McCulloch's—to train native-born ministers—for it was as difficult for Anglicans as for Presbyterians to attract the right men to Nova Scotia.

Inglis, it should also be said, had the common sense to see the folly and injustice of the ban on Dissenters and he fought against it. His Board of Governors, however, overruled him. The Board's action stirred up considerable resentment in the province and undoubtedly harmed King's College. It seems that the only person who thought of taking practical action in those years was McCulloch.

It was some years, however, before he was able to do much more than dream of his college. He lacked time as well as money; he was terribly overworked. He was preaching in his church, teaching in his school and looking after the needs of his wife and his growing family. Then, too, the people of the Pictou district wavered in their support of the idea of the college. McCulloch's vision seemed excessive to Highlanders who had had little or no schooling in Scotland and were happy with the simplest of education in Nova Scotia. The newly arrived settlers were preoccupied with the difficulties of getting started in a country that was still raw and rough. Education was not a priority.

Nonetheless it was an increasingly prosperous time for Pictou. By 1816 McCulloch was writing to his friend the Reverend John Mitchell in Glasgow: "The country is settling and improving with amazing rapidity. As an evidence of this I may mention that when I came here the roads were such as I had never seen the like. A horse had enough to do to get along. Now they are admirable, and a mail coach runs regularly every week between this place and Halifax."[8]

This prosperity was based on the timber trade. Since 1807, when Napoleon had blockaded the Baltic ports from which Britain had traditionally obtained timber, Pictou had been shipping more timber than ever before. There were years when exports out of Pictou totalled more than £300,000. Perhaps, in the long run, this trade damaged Pictou. It was all too easy to make quick money cutting timber, and Pictou County farmers turned to felling the marvellous stands of white pine, denuding the forests, which both MacGregor and McCulloch thought deplorable. To many, the real long-term industry—agriculture—was being neglected while farmers were lured into spending their quick profits on the readily available quantities of rum.

In the end, however, it was probably this period of prosperity that enabled McCulloch to get his college started at last. He had much help from his good friend Edward Mortimer, leading Pictou merchant, member of the Legislative Assembly for Pictou, and a man of very useful influence in Halifax. Also the Governor, Sir John Coape Sherbrooke, approved of the project. An Act granting a charter to an Academy at Pictou was passed in the Assembly in 1816. A new subscription list was

Portrait of Edward Mortimer by Robert Field, c. 1812 (Collection of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia).

circulated in Pictou, and this time enough money was collected to start a building, Mortimer heading the subscription list with £100 and MacGregor and McCulloch each put down £50. In 1817, twelve years after that first meeting in 1805, Pictou Academy finally opened its doors.

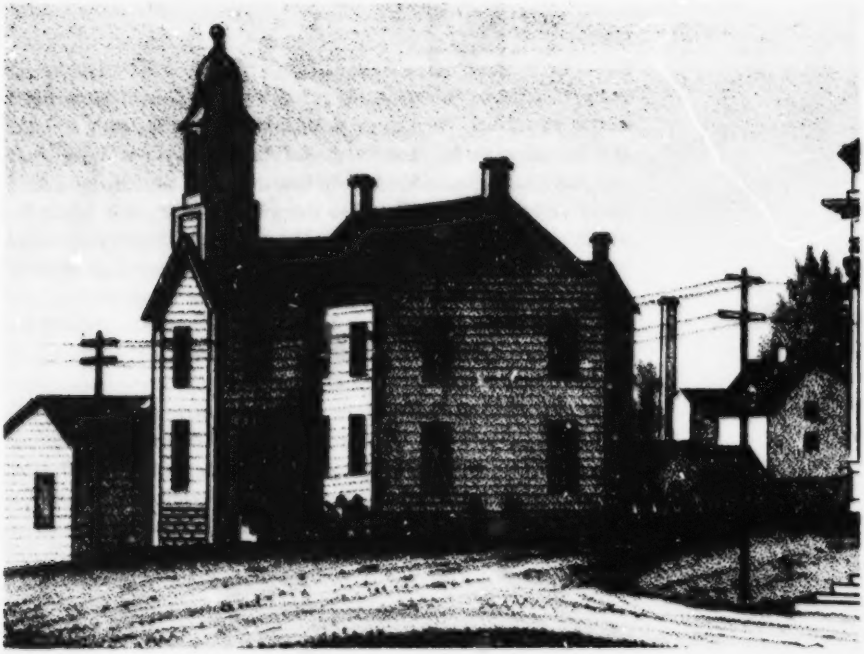
From the beginning it was a financial struggle. Indeed the need for money for the Academy never ended. Through the years Pictou's own citizens continued to contribute to the Academy. Before his sad early death in 1819 (a grave blow to McCulloch, who lost one of his supporters in the Assembly), Mortimer had collected over £100 in Halifax; by 1824 the Pictou congregation alone had donated almost £500. One James MacPherson gave £6, signing his name with an X. The contributions were often as small as £2, and there were many men who dug into their pockets for a few shillings.

In that first class there were sixteen students, many of them Highlanders. The roll-call could have been heard in many a Scottish village: the names were Patterson, McLean, Murdoch, McGillivray, Ross, Dunbar, Fraser, McDonald, Archibald. McCulloch's eldest son, Michael, was in the class, along with MacGregor's son James and Jotham Blanchard, who later become the editor of the Pictou newspaper, the *Colonial Patriot*. Some of the students came from homes where Gaelic was spoken, but the language of the classroom was English. McCulloch did not have Gaelic, and in any case there were no Gaelic textbooks (only the Bible and the catechism had been translated at that time).

Fees were low, in keeping with the tradition established in the sixteenth century by that reforming Scot, John Knox, that education must be available to all. McCulloch's whole understanding of education was in agreement with this tradition. At Glasgow University, his Alma Mater, a poor student could get by on £15 to £17 a year for fees, food and a bed. Exact figures for the early years at Pictou Academy are not available; in 1828, however, it seems that the trustees charged fees of £3 per year.

In June of 1818 McCulloch reported to his friend the Reverend John Mitchell of Glasgow: "At present we have the favour of the public, but whether this will continue must depend considerably upon our labour and success in teaching." And he asked for books. He specified inexpensive editions; those for the students could be second-hand if they were in good condition. Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Kaimes' *Elements of Criticism*, Potter's *Grecian Antiquities*, Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Hutcheson's *Philosophy*, Burke *On the Sublime*, David Hume's *Complete Works*, Burlamaque's *Jurisprudence*, Stewart's *Outlines of Moral Philosophy*, Descartes, Hobbes, Ricardo, Monboddo, Malthus, De Luc's *Geology*, Smillie's *Natural History* . . . books for the students, for the teachers, for the college library. Certain books were to be marked "Pictou Ladies' Society", for the ladies of Pictou had collected a little money for this purpose.

The second term began in October of 1818, this time with thirty students and a second teacher. McCulloch himself taught the classes in Greek and Hebrew, Logic, Moral and Natural Philosophy, and, later, in Chemistry, with occasional lectures



Pictou Academy is pictured in the *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Pictou County, Nova Scotia.* Philadelphia, J. H. Meacham, 1879.

on Political Economy. By November of that year he was writing to Mr. Mitchell in Glasgow in great good spirits that they had now put up a very handsome building, fifty-four feet by thirty-five feet, and two stories high; there were two classrooms, a library, laboratory and museum— "that is to say, when we get them . . . With respect to our prospects," he went on, "I think them good. I do not mean that we have no opposition, but I think we will overcome it." He needed more books for the library, too; the list he enclosed was very long indeed, and in those first years it grew with almost every letter to Mitchell.

There is something profoundly moving in McCulloch's pleasure in introducing his Pictou students to the most enlightened minds in Europe. A more practical man might have compromised, perhaps aimed a little lower, bowed a bit to the wind. But the Academy had become his life. Not everyone in Pictou wished to accept McCulloch's high standards, however, or to live with his singlemindedness of purpose. From the beginning he had his detractors.

McCulloch had always insisted that his college must be nonsectarian; that was the Scottish tradition, and it was surely even more desirable in Nova Scotia's colonial circumstances. In fact, with Edward Mortimer's political support, the Bill of 1816 had in fact accepted the idea of a nonsectarian academy and it had been adopted by the Assembly without difficulty. However, the Legislative Council decided to alter the intention of the Bill. The Council added an amendment requiring Academy trustees to declare on oath that they were either members of the Church of England or accepted the Westminster Confession (i.e., declared themselves as Presbyterians).[9] By thus making McCulloch's position seem to be sectarian after all, the Council apparently hoped that the Academy would lose some support from other non-Anglican groups, and to some extent their hopes were gratified.

Other points in that Bill were sources of trouble. One was the name itself. McCulloch intended to give courses at a college level; his students would be of college age and he wanted to call the institution a College. He also supposed, that it would eventually gain degree-granting powers. But he was overruled by his trustees, who felt it would be wiser if the Pictou institution did not attract too much attention to itself. It would be better to describe it as an Academy, rather than the College it would in fact be. The trustees hoped by this stratagem to avoid stirring up the antagonism of the powerful friends of King's College. In later years, however, the trustees' reluctance to give the Academy its correct title proved to be a disastrous error in judgement. McCulloch was accused of dishonesty, of attempting to gloss over the true situation. Had the Academy been a college in name as well as in fact, much subsequent trouble might have been avoided.

To his dismay, some of McCulloch's most worrying opposition came from the Church of Scotland—the Kirk—the main body of Presbyterianism from which the Secession Church had broken away. Much of this opposition was a reflection of the split in Scotland. The Secession Church of Scotland was strongest in the Lowlands and the industrial areas of the south. It had some strength in Mr. MacGregor's

region of Perthshire, which was still Highland but also in touch with Edinburgh and Glasgow; in the West Highlands (where most of the Pictou settlers had originated), the Secession had never been successful and indeed had been regarded with some mistrust.

A Highland population was a conservative population. In their new lives in Nova Scotia they would have preferred to stay with the Kirk, but the Church of Scotland had sent very few men to Nova Scotia. The first minister to settle in the Pictou district was Donald Fraser, and he did not arrive until 1817. The earlier settlers had been very happy with the ministrations of Mr. MacGregor and his colleagues, whom they had grown to love. But as new people arrived some of them objected to the Secession Church; it was not preaching the true gospel. Extremists saw it as wishing to destroy the true Kirk. It must also be said that Kirk supporters often objected to having to pay the minister's stipend themselves, the system the Secession Church had to follow. In Scotland the ministers of the Church of Scotland were paid with church funds, not by the congregation.

By May of 1819 McCulloch was writing to Mitchell: "We are meeting with the violent opposition of the Church (of England) and, what is more mortifying, the secret enmity of some and the indifference of others of the Presbyterian clergy . . . Still, I trust the institution will surmount these difficulties. It is acquiring the approbation of the country."

There would also have been people made wary by the use of the term "Academy." Academies had been a fairly recent innovation in Scottish education; they represented a modernization of the old classical curriculum. The grammar schools were the institutions that upheld tradition and respectability; academies represented everything disturbing about modern science and thought. To some of the more conservative Pictonians McCulloch and his Academy were, by definition, disturbers of the intellectual peace.

McCulloch's most exasperating difficulties, however, probably arose out of the personal enmity of Michael Wallace, who was both Provincial Treasurer and a powerful member of the Legislative Council. Dr. George Patterson, the historian of Pictou County, describes Wallace as "distinguished

even in those days of irresponsible power, for his adherence to arbitrary principles and his hatred of everything like popular rights." Years earlier, in the election of 1799, Wallace had run for the Pictou seat and had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Edward Mortimer. From that time on, Wallace's attitude towards Pictou was one of unrelenting hostility, particularly against Mortimer who had beaten him and McCulloch who was Mortimer's friend.

It was on the question of finance that McCulloch's difficulties most consistently found expression, and on that same issue Wallace, as Provincial Treasurer, could most consistently block McCulloch. Nova Scotia was a colony with a colonial administration and an Assembly elected from among the people of Nova Scotia. The Legislative Council of twelve members was appointed, usually by the Lieutenant-Governor in Halifax. Most members of the Assembly were non-Anglicans and generally favourable to McCulloch's cause. Most of the Council were Anglicans, drawn from official life in Halifax and supporters of King's College.

King's enjoyed an annual grant from London of £1,250, plus a second permanent grant from the province of £500. McCulloch wanted a permanent grant for the Academy. He never achieved it. Each year he had to re-apply for the money. Each year the Assembly would vote him a grant. Sometimes the Council would pass it (although with only a bare majority), sometimes veto it. In principle the Council continued to approve money from public funds for the Anglican King's College and to resist the idea of granting money to the Presbyterian college. From 1825 on, in the years when McCulloch was becoming a more and more controversial figure, more and more involved in the politics of education, the Council consistently rejected the Academy trustees' application for a permanent grant. By 1829 seven bills had been passed by the Assembly and rejected by the Council, and the Assembly debates were increasingly concerned with the constitutionality of the Council's stand, rather than with the simple matter of the injustice to the Academy.

The Academy managed to survive only through support from the Pictou area and from Scotland, and through McCulloch's unceasing labours to raise money. In 1825 he went to Scotland to plead the Academy's cause and came back with several hundred pounds donated by sympathizers. His pen was prodigiously, tirelessly, incessantly busy. He wrote articles for

newspapers; he produced an exhausting continuum of letters, memorials, petitions and pleas on behalf of the Academy. And he taught, brilliantly.

Throughout its years of financial and political struggle the college flourished academically. By 1819 as McCulloch wrote to Mitchell in Glasgow there were thirty-four students, and he was branching out into teaching a course in Natural Philosophy (the old term for Natural History, and comprising such subjects as Botany, Zoology and Geology). "I am become a mighty hunter of flies,"[10] he wrote Mitchell, and sent him a list of equipment to buy for his courses in science. And, later, "In the space of four years we have created the most elegant building of its size in the province, provided considerable scientific equipment and laid the foundation of a library." The students wore scarlet gowns, following the Glasgow practice.

The Academy was a matter of deep pride. In 1822 the first class graduated, and Mr. MacGregor, now elderly, addressed them: "I believe," he told his audience, "that without knowledge people cannot be good, neither good Christians, nor good citizens: neither good servants to God, nor good neighbours to men. In one or two generations we shall have millions for our present thousands. Without knowledge, what shall such millions be? They will not know their rights as rational beings, nor be qualified to assert and defend them. And though we leave them that sweet inheritance of liberty, they will not be able to retain it; they will gradually degenerate into little better than Austrians, Spaniards or Portugues. ...." This last phrase was a reference to the tyrannical powers ruling in some European countries and the growing resistance to such tyranny. Thomas Paine himself could not have produced a more liberal statement of the rights of rational beings than that old Seceder, James MacGregor of Pictou.

The various groups of Seceders in the province had united in 1817 as the Presbyterian Church in Nova Scotia, and had persuaded McCulloch to teach a course in theology to those of his students who intended to become ministers. In 1824 the first four theological students graduated, and McCulloch decided to send them to the University of Glasgow to write the examina-

tion for a Master of Arts degree. Three went. They passed with the warmest of praise; they had been as well prepared as if they had done all their studies at Glasgow. It was one of McCulloch's proudest hours, a justification of all his labours.

Another major battle was looming, however, this time over the matter of educating Secessionist ministers. Among his enemies McCulloch had not only Michael Wallace and the Anglicans, but also two ministers of the Church of Scotland who were living in the Pictou district: the amiable Donald Fraser, who had come in 1817, and Kenneth McKenzie, who arrived from the Hebrides in 1824, young, highly educated and filled with the Kirkman's scorn for the Secession Church.

The Kirk (as the Church of Scotland was popularly known) could contain a wide range of attitudes and convictions among its ministers. Dr. Witherspoon of the Philadelphia Company and the Hector settlement, renowned minister of the Kirk, respected principal of Princeton College, supporter of the American War of Independence, was sympathetic to many of the Secession views. McKenzie, on the other hand, would be described today as a rock-hard conservative. In Nova Scotia he saw himself as the natural ally of that other State Church, the Anglican, especially in the Anglican battle against the Academy. "Between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland," McCulloch wrote gloomily, "I am in a sad pickle."

McCulloch and McKenzie would have been at opposite ends of both the Presbyterian and the political poles. There was no way that McCulloch, with his Paisley background, nurtured in the radical traditions of the textile trade, could meet on common ground with a man like McKenzie, who had nothing but scorn for everything colonial and for McCulloch's ambitions for Pictou.

The Church of Scotland had committed itself to an unworkable policy of supplying ministers from Scotland. Very few men had been persuaded to come to Nova Scotia, and McKenzie was enraged to find that the result of the Kirk's policy had been to give the Secession Church (numerically somewhat stronger) an influential base in Nova Scotia. In his view the Academy was the symbol of everything detestable in the colony; the notion of training the backwoods boys of

Pictou County to be ministers was utterly ridiculous. He then easily swayed Fraser into supporting him in what became a vicious campaign against the Academy.

McKenzie was particularly successful in creating suspicion about the Academy in the minds of official (and Anglican) Halifax. In 1820, when the extra course had been added for the small group of Secession students who wished to study for the ministry, McCulloch was appointed Professor of Divinity, at first without salary. He was at the time still acting as minister of the First Presbyterian Church at Pictou and teaching his other courses at the Academy. This divinity class met only once a fortnight, in a classroom that otherwise would have been unused;[11] in any case there was no other space available in the village. But McKenzie seized on this class to demonstrate McCulloch's "dishonesty". Obviously the Academy was sectarian after all, he proclaimed, and McCulloch's high-minded oratory about offering education to students of all faiths could be dismissed as chicanery.

In 1826 McKenzie and Fraser tried to have the Academy reduced to the status of a Grammar School (although the Pictou Grammar School was already providing excellent education to its students). The trustees rejected the proposal. McKenzie accordingly demanded that McCulloch should be prohibited from lecturing to the divinity class. This also was refused. McKenzie's next move was to present a petition against the Academy to the Legislature which, after an enquiry, resulted in a vote of confidence for the Academy. If McCulloch became a little paranoid in the ensuing years he had good reason.

Lord Dalhousie, the Lieutenant-Governor, was another cause of difficulty. He had come to the colony in 1816. A high-ranking officer in the army and an aristocrat, he was also a Scot, and thoroughly imbued with the Scottish ideal concerning education. From his first visit to King's College he regarded it as highly unsuitable for Nova Scotia; in this his ideas were much the same as McCulloch's. Dalhousie decided that what Nova Scotia required was indeed a non-sectarian college, modelled on the University of Edinburgh. Perhaps rightly, he thought it should be in Halifax, the centre of population. Before he left the province in 1820 to be Governor General of Lower and Upper Canada, he laid the cornerstone of Dalhousie College in Halifax, which was to be non-sectarian, open to all.

Dalhousie seems to have found McCulloch testy and difficult, and it seems clear that McCulloch, who had probably

become obsessional about Pictou, misinterpreted Dalhousie's motives. Instead of joining with him in their common cause—the establishment of the much-needed nonsectarian college—he resented Dalhousie's intervention and continued to battle for Pictou as the site.

For a man described by his son William as having indifferent health, McCulloch seems to have had unlimited energy for the battle. Although after 1824 he concerned himself solely with the Academy, until that year he was minister of the church in Pictou as well as principal of the Academy, teaching several subjects. He had nine children, of whom six were boys and would have to get a good start in life. He was never free of anxiety about money, for his own needs as well as for the Academy, and in 1821 he became an author as a means of increasing his income.

Under the pseudonym of Mephibosheth Stepsure, McCulloch began to publish in the *Acadian Recorder* of Halifax a series of satirical comments on provincial life.[12] He wrote to Mitchell: "No writing in these provinces ever occasioned so much talk. Almost everyone who read them was angry in his turn and by and by laughed at his neighbour." The letters are surprisingly skillful, written with a light touch, but at the same time poking rather ungentle fun at the follies of the new society of Nova Scotia, at the social climbing, the get-rich-quick schemes, the avoidance of hard work.

About a man who was neglecting his farm for the sake of running a busy tavern, he wrote: "I do not know how it is in Halifax; but in the country, it is really a great hardship to be a respectable gentleman. Such a person, for the sake of character, must do a great many things which he would otherwise avoid. Accordingly, when Mr. Soakem was abroad, in order to maintain his reputation, he would stop at every tavern on the road and show how a gentleman ought to behave . . . ."

And again, about a young man named Hob Gosling— "[he] is really a smart young fellow; and in haying time or harvest, he can do more work in a day than any three labourers. But hard work requires recreation; and when a young man does anything uncommon, he wishes to receive credit for it among his neighbours. Accordingly, it would sometimes happen, that it would take Hob a week to tell about the exertions of a day. He

would also occasionally recreate himself by riding races, or playing a game of cards when he was drinking a glass of grog with other youngsters over Mr. Tipple's counter, and by these means, though Hob is not a quarrelsome young man, his name was frequently called over in court in assault and battery cases. This, it is true, was not without its advantages. Hob acquired a great knowledge of the law . . . ."

Blackwood's Magazine of Edinburgh offered him £75 for *The Stepsure Letters*, but McCulloch didn't like the magazine's conservative and worldly tone and turned down the offer, although Blackwood's publishing company had presented some books to the Academy library. He wrote a pair of cautionary tales of the moral and spiritual hazards of emigration to Nova Scotia, *William* and *Melville*. They seem today almost absurdly pious, as though he was writing in the way he supposed a minister should. But there are interesting indications that in these stories McCulloch was trying out a larger idea and moving into the areas of Scottish history that were of great importance to him. An Edinburgh publisher paid him 30 guineas for the tales, and they enjoyed some small success.

He was usually writing from an urgent need for cash and at too much speed. An unpublished manuscript called *Auld Eppie's Tales* is among the McCulloch papers in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. He wrote to Mitchell about this work: "My story is not as well polished as I wish. The case of this you can easily guess. Three volumes were written in a year in addition to my daily tasks . . . One object which I had in view was to do a little to help my son Thomas into business . . . ."

In his early days in Nova Scotia McCulloch had written two treatises against the Catholic Church, *Popery Condemned* and *Popery Again Condemned*, and because of these two volumes he is often seen as filled with anti-Catholic prejudice.

One must remember, however, that this was still the period of the punitive laws against Catholics. In Scotland (and at least in theory in Nova Scotia) Catholics still lacked the right to conduct their own schools, or to celebrate marriages and funerals in public; such religious services had to be performed privately in a house. A Catholic could be a barrister but not a judge of the High Court. In England such laws were an

expression of the national determination to give no opportunity to the Catholic Stuarts or their supporters to have another fling at seizing power (as they had in 1745). But to Presbyterians in Scotland in the early nineteenth century, Catholicism meant not only the alien and temporal power of the Catholic church and the Pope, which they greatly feared, but also a kind of irrational, illogical philosophic fallacy, indeed a heresy, adherence to which could be as damning to a man's soul as any other sin. There are many Scotsmen alive today who were brought up to believe that the Pope was the Devil incarnate, but that was never McCulloch's position.

Indeed, in criticizing the Catholic church McCulloch might be seen to be arguing against his own deeply held liberal principles. Catholic emancipation was the liberal cause, the retention of the punitive laws the conservative position. *Blackwood's Magazine* in Edinburgh published article after article stating the case against emancipation, and these arguments reveal deep-burning fires of bigotry and prejudice. But in *Popery Condemned* and *Popery Again Condemned*, McCulloch does not argue for retention; he gives a half-amused, any-fool-can-see-this discussion of various points of Catholic dogma; one can hear far greater and uglier prejudice expressed by Edinburgh street orators even today. He discusses such matters as the supremacy of the Apostle Peter, the temporal authority exercised by the Pope, papal infallibility and so on. And it was this level of criticism of Catholicism that formed the basis of the completed part of *Auld Eppie's Tales*.

The story deals with the unscrupulous Abbott of Paisley. The work is awkwardly constructed and clumsy in shape, but McCulloch tackles the illogicalities (as he sees them) of the Catholic position with a blend of sardonic humour and deep seriousness that is sometimes more expressive than anything in *Stepsure*, and once he gets into the story itself it contains some of his best writing. Perhaps this is because in *Auld Eppie* McCulloch is going home, home to the countryside he knew as a boy. This does not prevent him from being realistic about what has happened to that countryside. He tells how the river has become industrialized. The water kelpies have gone from the stream, as has the grist mill, and a "huge unclassical cotton work monopolised its waters." But the world of his boyhood is at clear in his mind's eye as it was when he was living in it; one has to wonder if he was not writing of a wee Tam McCulloch when he says of one of his characters that "no boy in the school knew so many birds' nests, or when paddling in the river could

put his hand under a stone and pull out a trout with equal dexterity." He never loses his feelings for the countryside, either in his writing or in his life in Nova Scotia.

"The mighty hunter of flies" had sent a collection of Nova Scotian insects to the University of Glasgow, and partly in recognition of this gift the University awarded him the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1822. A second collection had involved the whole family. For some years all the McCulloch children as well as some of the students from the Academy had been hunting the woods with flynets and boxes, and his son Thomas in particular had shown great interest in collecting the specimens and mounting them. They were displayed in a large room of the Academy. It was the first museum of its kind in Eastern Canada and of very high quality, but eventually it grew too much for McCulloch. He tried without success to get some support from the province and in the end this fine collection went to London, where it was sold. But perhaps it was responsible for launching McCulloch's son Thomas on his career. For some years he taught classes in Natural Sciences (as well as Latin, Greek, Rhetoric and Belles Lettres) at Dalhousie, and eventually he became (in 1869) the Professor of Natural Philosophy.

In 1830 McCulloch embarked on a very enterprising project designed both as publicity for the Academy and as a money raiser for his family. He undertook a series of public lectures demonstrating some of the new and marvellous developments in science. He was by this time thirty years out of university, and although he had been teaching the science courses at the Academy the preparation of such a series of lectures must have involved prodigious work. He tried the lectures out first in Pictou, where they went well, and then he took himself and his "philosophical equipment" into Halifax.

He wrote to his son William:

"In Halifax there had never been any public exhibitions but of players and showmen, and I really felt as if I belonged to

that vagabond race. A bear and a few dancing dogs would have been suitable companions to the mood in which I entered into our gay and dissipated metropolis. To mend the matter, when my apparatus on two carriages was moving along the street, some wag gave notice to our Collector of Customs, who is one of our enemies in the Council, that a great cargo of smuggled tea had just come into town, and instantly I had a Customhouse officer at my heels. But learning that the packages were mine, instead of thinking of inspection he returned to his master, who by the jokes of his acquaintances about catching me for a smuggler, was sufficiently mortified . . . At the solicitation of Councillors, the Admiral, Commissary-General and other grandees who dine after six, I lectured three days a week at three o'clock. On the alternate days I lectured to another class at eight in the evening . . . In the compass of twenty-one lectures I managed to squeeze together a mass of the finest experiments in philosophy, and left my audience as eager as at the commencement of the course . . . [My lectures] brought me into contact with numbers in the higher circles to who I had been sadly misrepresented, and who did not find me that arrogant and violent man that they had heard me reported to be . . . ."

McCulloch improved the lectures and took them on tour, to Saint John, Charlottetown and the Miramichi towns. The general public was in those days almost entirely uninformed on scientific matters; McCulloch's laboratory at the Academy in Pictou was the only one east of Montreal, and the lectures awakened great public interest.

It is probable that they marked the zenith of his success. After 1826 the battles had grown fiercer. The Assembly continued to try for a permanent grant for the Academy and the Council to veto it, and sometimes even to veto the annual grant as well. In 1826 McKenzie presented his petition against the Academy, only to have it rejected. He tried another in 1828, filled (as was McKenzie's wont) with false accusations and figures. Indeed the anti-Academy faction consistently misreported the facts; the old story about the abuse of the terms of the Academy's charter came up again and again, in even more distorted form, and the Academy question filled more and more columns of the provincial press. There must have been many prominent people in Halifax who looked on McCulloch and his obsession as, at best, a boring nuisance, and to these people McKenzie addressed himself with some success.

In 1827 McCulloch's former student, Jotham Blanchard, had become the editor of a new weekly newspaper, the *Colonial Patriot*, to be produced in Pictou and to be a voice for the Liberal Party. It was the first provincial newspaper published outside of Halifax. Indeed Halifax was the bastion of imperial power, a deeply conservative society of colonial officials. The twenty-seven year old Blanchard set out to attack that society and, in particular, the Executive Council's irresponsible and arbitrary abuse of its powers. The Academy issue was but one example of such abuse; there were many others.

McCulloch was almost immediately taken by Halifax to be the paper's editor, or at least the author of the scathing editorials that had begun to appear. In fact, at first he kept himself severely distant from the paper. But events finally provoked him into action, and he rolled up his sleeves and set to work. In November of 1829 he wrote to Mitchell: "I have for almost a year written a weekly editorial in the *Colonial Patriot*, which our Council anticipates with dread . . . We have attacked them right and left in our Pictou *Patriot*, by argument, sarcasm and drollery, and now I believe they are heartily sorry that they made us their enemies . . . In the meantime we have said nothing about the Academy question . . . Sometimes with sound argument we have proved them an unconstitutional body, and everything that is politically bad, and at other times set the whole Province laughing at them. It was the sort of work that fine-tunes political understanding." Both Blanchard and McCulloch were seeing more and more clearly the inadequacies of the whole colonial system and the need for fiscal and constitutional reform. McCulloch's editorials for the *Patriot* were the most pertinent and pungent the province had ever known.

The *Colonial Patriot* attracted the attention of the youthful Joseph Howe, who had cut his journalistic teeth on the *Acadian* before taking over *The Novascotian* early in 1827, when he was twenty-four. Howe was conservative by family tradition and at first antagonistic to Blanchard, but in the two years between 1828 and 1830 his views moved closer and closer to Blanchard's Liberal stand.

For Howe, as well as for Pictou, everything came to a head in the notorious "Brandy" election in the autumn of 1830, in which Blanchard successfully ran as a Liberal. The immediate issue involved the collection of customs duties on brandy, but

so effective was the work of the *Patriot* that it was extended to include the whole question of the control of public money. Howe went to Pictou to observe the polling (which in those days lasted a week) and was appalled. In Pictou Town politics and religion had become interwoven with the Academy dispute. The Tory candidates came wearing Scotch bonnets on their heads (one wore a thistle on his bosom); their Highland supporters arrived armed with sticks. A group of sailors came up from the harbour, also armed. More voters arrived. Arguments erupted into violence; voters fought in the streets and in the taverns. The rioting lasted for several days and one man was killed. Howe was shocked by the whole affair, and particularly by the conduct of a group of Kirk ministers, Kenneth McKenzie among them, who did everything possible to stir up trouble in support of the Tory candidates. In the event the Tory party lost, and Howe reported happily in *The Novascotian* that liberal men and liberal principles had triumphed. From that time on, Joe Howe was a leading member of the movement for Responsible Government.

McCulloch had done what he could to quell the riot. But somehow some of the aura of election trouble had attached itself to him; once more he was the radical, one of the men who was making Pictou known as a centre of anti-government, even revolutionary activity. The old hostility from both the Anglican Church and the Kirk was rekindled. McKenzie reworked all his old accusations. Supported by the Kirk faction in Pictou, it was easy for him to persuade the authorities that McCulloch and the Academy represented a serious danger to the established order.

McCulloch was well respected throughout the province, if not in official Halifax, and the importance of his work in education was recognized. But his support was in the Assembly, not in the Council and the Council was pleased to listen to McKenzie. In 1832 a bill was passed that effectively destroyed the Academy's purpose and made its future uncertain. Enrolment dwindled, and with it McCulloch's income. In time, the Academy was downgraded, more or less, to the category of a grammar school, a college neither in fact or in name, its lustre diminished. McKenzie was the victor.

McCulloch's name was well known to many people outside the province as well, and when the famous naturalist Audubon was returning to the United States from a trip to Labrador in 1833, he dropped in to Pictou to call upon McCulloch. In his journal he gives a charming account of his visit.

"This evening," he writes, "we called on Professor McCullough (sic), who received us very kindly, giving us a glass of wine, showed his fine collection of well preserved birds and other things, and invited us to breakfast tomorrow at eight, when we are again to inspect his curiosities. The Professor's mansion is a quarter of a mile out of town, and looks very much like a small English villa."

The next morning, "We had an excellent Scotch breakfast at Professor McCullough's . . . I became more pleased with the professor the more he talked. I showed a few Labrador drawings, after which we went in a party to the University once more to examine his fine collection. I found there a dozen specimens of birds which I longed for and said so; and he offered them to me with so much apparent good will that I took them . . . He offered me all his freshwater shells, and any minerals I might choose. I took a few specimens of iron and copper. I am much surprised that this valuable collection is not purchased by the Government of the province; he offered it for £500. I think it well worth £1000. . . ."

Let us go back now for a moment to Lord Dalhousie and his intention to establish a non-sectarian college in Nova Scotia, preferably in Halifax rather than in Pictou. Dalhousie had unwisely appointed to his college board members who were essentially sympathetic to King's College at Windsor, Michael Wallace among them. After Lord Dalhousie left Halifax for Quebec in 1820, the Board was in no hurry to launch a new institution that would rival King's. Its members had proceeded so far as to agree to the erection of a building for the college on the Grand Parade, but the initiative to open its doors to students was lacking and for some years the building was used for any possible purpose other than a college.

Eventually it became clear that if Pictou Academy was in such a state of decline it could no longer train young men to enter the professions. Another institution would have to be provided to take its place. Some of the more influential Academy supporters began a move to open Dalhousie College. Since McCulloch's position was now a very difficult one, and since he still had many friends in the province, it was proposed that he should be the first principal of the new (nonsectarian) college.

It was an obvious solution, indeed an inevitable one, yet McCulloch was at first reluctant to agree. "It would be like tearing the flesh from my bones to leave Pictou," he wrote sadly to Mitchell. But the Legislature decided that the resources of Pictou Academy should be transferred to Dalhousie College, and in the end McCulloch had to accept the move to Halifax and the new life.

It was hoped that in this way the various groups of dissenters would be united, and to this end it was agreed that Dr. Crawley, the leading Baptist theologian in Nova Scotia, would be appointed to the Dalhousie faculty. A bill with this clause was passed in the Assembly session of 1838.

The Board of Governors of Dalhousie College, however, decided to ignore this agreement. The Board insisted that all professors other than McCulloch were to be members of the Church of Scotland, and they refused to appoint Dr. Crawley to the faculty. Lord Dalhousie's wish for a nonsectarian college, open to all, was abandoned. The college became a small denominational institution, and within the next few years higher education in the Maritime Provinces became splintered according to religious denomination. Dr. Crawley established Acadia College in Wolfville, the Roman Catholics founded St. Mary's in Halifax, and the Methodists Mount Allison at Sackville in New Brunswick.

McCulloch was sixty-two when he came to Dalhousie College in 1838. He was worn out by the long struggle to keep Pictou Academy going, and he was never again the firebrand of his earlier days. He spent five fairly peaceful years at Dalhousie, teaching the classes in Logic, Moral Philosophy and Rhetoric. Together with his son Thomas he worked on setting up a museum of natural history in Halifax. He and Thomas travelled around the province collecting specimens, and even managed an adventurous trip to Sable Island. Some of the birds from these collecting trips are still displayed in the Life Sciences Building at Dalhousie University.

Little has been said about the stalwart woman who stood behind McCulloch. She was Isabella Walker, a minister's daughter, who left her comfortable home first to marry her Thomas and then to share his life in Nova Scotia. Thomas says little about her himself and most of his surviving papers are

concerned with the Academy. Some of Isabella McCulloch's letters to her grandchildren exist, written to them from Halifax. They reveal a most delightful grandmother, loving and gentle and with an extraordinary range of interests. She is anxious to send the Pictou grandchildren seeds of different vegetables and flowers, she recommends various books and she passes on a French book left to them by their uncle Thomas before he sailed for a visit to the West Indies, as well as a book on the old Indian wars. "What were call'd uncivilised and savage creatures," wrote Mrs. McCulloch in her old age about the Indians, "were in many respects far superior to the educated men who were cruelly cutting them down for defending themselves and their property." It would be very interesting to learn more about Mrs. McCulloch.

Thomas McCulloch died on September 9, 1843, after a short illness. He was sixty-seven. What did he really bequeath to Nova Scotia? Even today he has his critics. He attempted too much; he spread himself too thin. He could perhaps have made peace with his enemies, come to terms with the Kirk, compromised his principles just a little, been altogether more reasonable. Who can say what he might have won, or lost, as a reasonable man?

He lacked political finesse. But he was not, after all, running for political office. He was fighting passionately for the Academy, for an ideal, for the whole principle of liberal education. Responsible government would in the end have come to Nova Scotia without Thomas McCulloch—perhaps indeed through Jotham Blanchard and Joseph Howe. But who can say where enlightenment begins? McCulloch was Blanchard's mentor, and McCulloch himself had had good masters. The years of struggle for the Academy sharpened and gave strength to his political instincts. He met, and recognized, and gave voice to the need for change.

McCulloch and the Academy flourished together for a remarkably short time—only fifteen years. But in those few years he gave to his students the expression of an ideal about the vigour of liberal thought to which they responded and in their turn passed on. The time, and the place, and the man were indeed ripe for each other.

And if McCulloch lost the battle over Pictou Academy, he certainly won the war, even if posthumously. After his death, an organization called Friends of Pictou Academy rebuilt the school into an honoured force in Nova Scotian education. It is true that it was never again quite a college—Dalhousie University grew in its stead. But the most famous of all the nineteenth century Pictou students was an early boy in McCulloch's classes: Sir William Dawson, world-famous geologist, principal of McGill University, President of the Royal Society. And Sir William was one among hundreds. In the Academy's second flowering, during the last half of the nineteenth century, an army of scholars and professional men marched out through its doors; two provincial premiers, two lieutenant governors, four judges, eight university presidents, fourteen newspaper editors, twenty-five missionaries, forty university professors, sixty-three lawyers and one hundred and ninety doctors. Plus more than three hundred ministers. There have been many many hundreds since—all from one small academy in a small provincial town in Nova Scotia. And they are coming still. Even McCulloch's most golden dream could not quite have matched the reality.

Footnotes

1 John A. Irving was professor of ethics and social philosphy at Victoria College, University of Toronto, He was the editor of *The Stepsure Letters*, by Thomas McCulloch. Published by McClelland and Stewart Limited in the New Canadian Library Series, 1960.

2 One of the best of the Paisley weaver-poets was Robert Tannahill (1774-1810). There is an interesting connection with Nova Scotia here. His poem "The Soldier's Adieu" seems to have been the origin for the song collected by Helen Creighton which has become known as "Farewell to Nova Scotia." Tannahill's first verse is:

> The weary sun's gane doun the west,
> The birds sit nodding on the tree,
> All Nature now inclines for rest
> But rest allow'd there's nane for me.

See *The Dalhousie Review*, Autumn, 1978. "Origins of 'Farewell to Nova Scotia'," by Linda Christine Craig.

3 This was probably Robert Pagan, a nephew of the John Pagan of the Philadelphia Company. The Dawson mentioned would have been John Dawson, a Pictou merchant, described by Dr. Patterson as a man "of education and sound mind." Sir William Dawson was the son of another Dawson, James, who came to Pictou in 1811 and was not related to John Dawson.

4 *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, by James Boswell. Oxford University Press Standard Authors edition, p. 267. There are a number of other interesting references to emigration in both Johnson's and Boswell's accounts of their Scottish adventure of 1773.

5 *Caledonian Mercury*, 29 September 1773.

6 *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 28 September 17[illegible].

7 *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 29 October 1773.

8 The Reverend John Mitchell, D.D., of Glasgow, was a life-long friend of Thomas McCulloch. They had been fellow students at Glasgow University. Mitchell gave much practical aid to McCulloch and Pictou Academy.

9 The Westminster Confession was an early statement of the doctrine of the Church of Scotland, largely based on Calvin's teachings.

10 There is a Biblical reference in McCulloch's mild joke: "Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord." Genesis 10:9.

11 This was the modest beginning of Pinehill Divinity Hall in Halifax, the training college for, first, Presbyterian, and later United Church ministers. It is now the ecumenical Atlantic School of Theology.

12 *The Stepsure Letters* were published some years earlier than Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *Sam Slick*, which began appearing in *The Novascotian* in 1835.

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Many other books, periodicals, articles, newspapers, particularly of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Scotland and in Nova Scotia, provided source material as well.